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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002544

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SUBJECT: NINEWA: REOPENING OF MOSUL AIRPORT A KEY PRIORITY  
FOR THE PROVINCE

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Leader Alex Laskaris for Reasons 1.4 (b&d).

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

11. (C) Summary: The re-opening of Mosul's civilian airport is a key priority in the economic development of Ninewa Province, both for short-term job-creation and for longer-term economic growth. Working with our partners in IAD and 3ACR, and Embassy Baghdad, we are engaging the GOI in order to resume commercial air service into Mosul for the first time since 1993. A GOI-imposed start-date of August 15 is, however, unrealistic. We will try to help the Iraqis work through remaining financial, technical and logistical obstacles, but are counseling them to avoid arbitrary deadlines. Along with the re-opening of the Rabiya Port of Entry (POE), a functioning civilian airport would provide critical economic stimuli to a province that has failed to realize its potential; it would also ease the isolation imposed on Ninewa's citizenry by a shuttered airport, sealed borders and dangerous roads. End summary.

Mosul Airport: Symbol or Substance?

12. (C) Since the facility briefly reopened in December 2007 for Hajj flights, reopening the Mosul airport full-time has been a priority for the USG in Ninewa. A commercial airport would be an important symbol of Ninewa's continued progress toward a return to normalcy and an important economic driver.

However, a number of obstacles, including civil aviation security (AVSEC) and financial constraints, must still be overcome. While Iraqi government technocrats support the project, local government leaders are not interested in using provincial resources on it. This unwillingness to press for the airport's development contrasts sharply with the remarkable success enjoyed by our neighbors operating Erbil and Sulaymaniyah airports, and with the heavy political and financial capital invested by An-Najaf Province officials in the upstart Najaf International Airport.

13. (SBU) The physical plant of the airport remains in acceptable condition to open operations, partly due to CF use of the airport, but security issues need to be resolved. On July 15, Iraq's Civil Aviation Authority (ICAA) signed a contract with an international security company, Sabre International Security, to provide security services to the airport. The contract specified that the airport should be ready for operation on August 15. However, the life-support facility designated for Sabre was ransacked and the remaining operational infrastructure is insufficient for operations. Additionally, the contract specifies that Sabre will operate the airport in accordance with the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) standards. At present, the Mosul airport has only some of the screening equipment required to operate in accordance with the ICAO standard without subjecting passengers and other airport terminal

customers to physical searches. In short, the airport remains unready to begin full-scale operations, and is not likely to meet the GOI-imposed August 15 deadline for start-up.

Significant problems remain

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¶4. (SBU) Providing advanced AVSEC equipment for the terminal, the passenger and cargo pre-screening equipment, and aircraft support equipment to conduct the full range of airport operations, would cost approximately \$15 million, including about \$9 million in security equipment and \$5 million in aircraft ground-support equipment. Until the equipment is acquired, time-consuming hand searches and vehicle inspections will be required. Furthermore, there is likely to be a need to construct additional off-airport facilities to conduct AVSEC pre-screenings before passengers arrive at the terminal. Finally, the airport realistically needs a number of additional buildings on the grounds of the airport for sustainable operations.

...And Uncertain Funding

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¶5. (C) It remains unclear where funding for the necessary security equipment and physical plant will come from and when it could be provided. Thus far, the Ministry of Transportation has not provided necessary funds and does not seem willing to include funds for operations in future budgets. Nor has Ninewa Governor Khasmullah shown any interest in supporting the re-opening. However, Zuhair

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Chalabi, charged by PM Maliki to lead an urgent, high-impact program of post-combat reconstruction, recently told senior U.S. military and PRT leaders that he has agreed to fund at least some construction. He may also be willing to fund some equipment purchases, but has limited money remaining from his \$100 million budget. However, local ICAA representatives have privately told the PRT that they doubt that Chalabi will provide much assistance. Despite these challenges, the Director General of the ICAA is committed to opening the airport and is focused on Mosul's capabilities in the short term, over its emerging rival for development attention, Najaf.

Mosul Airport: A Symbol of Normalcy

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¶6. (SBU) Regular airline flights to and from the airport would be an important symbol of an ongoing return to normalcy. At present, citizens of Ninewa face great difficulty in traveling. Entry into the KRG for Arabs, including to Erbil's airport, requires a passport and subjects travelers to harassment at Peshmerga checkpoints. Ninewa's one POE into Syria has been closed since March 2008, and road travel remains dangerous and unpredictable.

¶7. (SBU) The start-up of air operations from Mosul could give a powerful economic boost to Ninewa's economy. Re-opening commercial airport service could immediately add several hundred jobs in Mosul and lead to increased economic activity, such as increased trade from greater domestic and international market access. The airport would encourage a local service industry that could add additional jobs in Mosul over the long-term. We are beginning discussions with the provincial leadership to develop business zones around the airport, but that might slip into the next local administration.

Security Remains a Constant Concern

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¶8. (C) The airport or aircraft operating from Mosul could be targeted by terrorists. Regular service cannot resume until

the airport operators demonstrate a solid plan to secure the terminal and support facilities, screen passengers and cargo, and control access to the wider airport. Passengers would have to travel on a road that passes between FOB Marez and FOB Diamondback before entering the airport terminal area, and U.S forces would have to carefully examine any plans to regularly transport passengers and cargo so close to these major bases. We will work closely with our CF and ISF partners on this critical aspect of airport operations.

19. (C) Comment: There is benefit to marking August 15 with some sort of public event, but we should not confuse a PD event with the actual re-opening of the facility. The GOI has to address the security, financial and technical challenges before anyone can buy a ticket for the shuttle to BIAP. The only temporal consideration is having the airport operating in time for the Hajj season in early December \*having to put together another on-the-fly operation might be an embarrassment to the GOI given that they have had a year to address the issue. However, the PRT has clearly, but quietly, told the ICAA that the re-opening of Mosul airport must happen when it is ready, not on an arbitrary date. The potential economic and PR benefits argue for continued USG efforts to help the Iraqis realize the immediate goal of an operational Mosul airport. End Comment.  
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